

Writing Your Lawmakers

"Ten letters from constituents represent the concerns of 10,000 citizens," said former Congressman Billy Evan (D-GA). So if we're going to complain about bad government policy, we might as well complain to those making the laws.

Letters to policy makers are an effective tool to demonstrate public support for drug law reform. The names of your U.S. Senators and Representatives can be obtained at www.vote-smart.org, or by calling the Congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121.

- Identify yourself as a constituent or a concerned citizen, not as a member of the November Coalition or some other organization. You are a voter, not a special interest group.
- If you are writing about a particular bill, reference the bill's number and state why you support or oppose it in the first sentence or paragraph. The next paragraph(s) should contain facts that support your position. For instance: NOT: "Legalize drugs." RATHER: "Please support House Bill HR1717 (The Truth in Trials Act) to respect state's rights on medical marijuana."
- Finally, ask for a response; and don't be disappointed if that response differs from your views—you are stamping out ignorance step by step.
- Stamp out drug war ignorance at:
www.November.org
www.JourneyForJustice.org
www.OpenTheCan.org
www.drugwarfacts.org

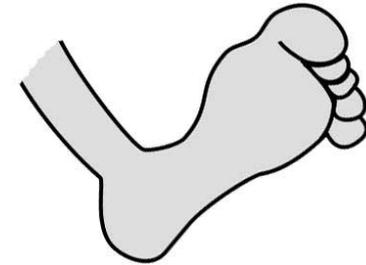


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Working to end drug war injustice

Stamp Out Ignorance



with

**November
Coalition's**

Letter

**Writing
Guide**

Be brief; under 300 words, if possible.

Sentences should not be too long, and paragraphs no more than 3 sentences in length. Work to eliminate unnecessary words. Get to the point immediately by stating your conclusion first. Then, support your conclusion with facts. Finally, restate your conclusion.

- Proofread your work. Use a dictionary and a thesaurus. Let friends read and critique your letter. Edit and rewrite as often as necessary to be clear, concise and to the point.
- Don't give up. If your letters don't get published at first, keep trying. And even when you're not published, you are learning a valuable craft, and at the same time, getting your message across to a few copy editors.

Stomp On!

Have a letter writing PARTY! Choose a topic and gather your friends. Make it a potluck, or prepare snacks. Edit each other's work and make helpful suggestions. Some may want to proofread, or gather addresses and process the letters for mailing. Editors love letters from children, too.



Ignorance happens when people aren't told the truth.

According to the White House, we're really winning the drug war now!



But when people hear the facts, they learn and attitudes change. Factual letter writing about the horrible suffering inflicted by the drug war is a powerful tool.

Letters to editors are published FREE in your local newspapers and magazines, reaching thousands of readers. You can help stamp out ignorance with letter writing and help shape public opinion, which politicians shouldn't ignore.



Bob loses his seat in the Senate!

Letters to Editors are short, simple and are no place to rant or wander. So step along and follow these simple steps to letter writing:

Read letters to editors in your local newspapers and magazines to get an idea of what your letter might look like.



Watch for articles and letters that address these issues:

DRUG ABUSE (If addiction is a medical problem, why are police, and not doctors, assigned to address it?)

PRISON OVERCROWDING (The federal prison system operated at 31% over capacity in 2001. Granting early release to nonviolent drug prisoners would solve this crisis and save taxpayers money.)

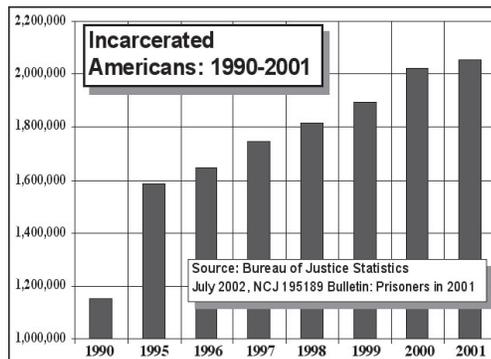
DRUG RELATED CRIME (Drug prohibition creates the underground economy that causes crime.)

Plan your letter around what you read. Thank the newspaper for focusing on the benefits of drug treatment over prison, for instance. Take issue with slanted news items: "It's ironic that your June 2 front page article states, 'Economy brightens with new prison' when drug enforcement costs society 15 times as much as drug treatment for the same economic benefit."

Letters don't have to be in response to news items. On **MOTHER'S DAY** remind readers that thousands of mothers are celebrating the holiday behind bars, separated from their children who are growing up without them. Add facts: "The incarceration rate of women in U.S. prisons is 10 times that of Western European countries."

On **VETERAN'S DAY** remind readers that thousands of veterans who served our country languish in prison because of this war against our own people.

At **CHRISTMAS** time, for another example, remind your fellow citizens that Jesus forgave people and spoke compassionately of those in prison.



- Speak positively. NOT: "Drug users are not bad people, as Ms. Jones suggests." INSTEAD: "Many who are in prison for drug use were responsible, productive citizens."

- Don't assume your readers know the issues. NOT: "The drug war is racist." INSTEAD: "People of color comprise almost 80% of state drug war prisoners, but only 25% of the nation's population."

- Be inclusive. NOT: "Don't always believe what you read." INSTEAD: "We can't always depend on balanced news coverage when it comes to the drug war."

- Use imagery. NOT: "We can't afford any more drug war orphans." INSTEAD: "Two and a half million children are growing up without mothers and fathers, mostly due to drug war incarceration."

- Use positive suggestions. NOT: "Stop putting people in jail." INSTEAD: "Prison has proven to be the least effective deterrent to drug use, abuse and addiction."

- Avoid personal grudges. NOT: "That stupid cop that put my brother in jail." INSTEAD: "Many in law enforcement see the futility of drug interdiction and would rather spend their time protecting citizens from violent criminals."

- Personalize your letter. NOT: "People in prison lose hope." INSTEAD: "Have you ever talked to someone who has lost all hope and reason to live? Well, I have."